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DAWN

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ECP pushes Senate by-poll beyond constitutional deadline

- Punjab seat fell vacant after death of Irfan Siddiqui
- Critics say decision is meant to help PML-N, allowing it more time to pick candidate

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: In yet another violation of the Constitution, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has taken the poll date for a Senate seat from Punjab beyond the deadline stipulated in the green book.

The schedule for by-election on the seat, which fell vacant due to death of PML-N parliamentary leader in the Senate Irfanul Haque Siddiqui, has been amended within 48 hours of its issuance.

"In exercise of powers conferred under Article 218(3) read with Article 254 of the Constitution, Sections 107 and 128 of the Elections Act, 2017, and all other powers enabling in this behalf, the Election Programme issued vide Notification of even number dated 17th November, 2025, for conduct of Senate Election against one general seat from Punjab province, which fell vacant due to death of Mr Irfanul Haque Siddiqui, is hereby amended due to ongoing activities of (12) By-Elections in different National/ Provincial Assembly constituencies. Consequently, above referred Notification stands modified," said a notification issued by the ECP on Wednesday.

The notification, a copy of which is available with *Dawn*, was purportedly issued on Wednesday, but emerged only on Thursday, a day before the last date for filing nominations under the original schedule. Surprisingly, the notification is still not available on the ECP's official website.

Under Article 224(5) of the Constitution, a vacancy in the Senate is to be filled within 30 days from the date of its occurrence. The Senate seat became vacant on Nov 10, and by-election was supposed to be held by Dec 9, the date previously fixed as the poll day.

A senior ECP official when contacted said the schedule had been amended due to other ongoing electoral activities and not under any political influence. He said that under Article 254 of the Constitution, "When any act or thing is required by the Constitution to be done within a particular period and it is not done within that period, the doing of the act or thing shall not be invalid or otherwise ineffective by reason only that it was not done within that period".

He also referred to Section 107 of the Elections Act, which specifies timeline for various stages of Senate elections starting from inviting nominations and said under Section 128 of the Act, "The Commission may, for reasons which it considers sufficient, extend the time for completion of an election to the Senate by making necessary amendments in the notification issued under Section 107". He, however, could not explain as to how by-polls in some constituencies necessitate putting off Senate by-polls where members of a provincial assembly are to cast votes.

Critics say the decision was clearly meant to please the PML-N, allowing it more time to pick a candidate for the seat. They point out that the poll date for by-election on 13 National and provincial assembly seats was Nov 23 and insist that there was no cogent reason to delay the Senate by-election for a month after that. Under the schedule issued on Nov 17, nomination papers were to be submitted on Nov 20 and 21 while scrutiny of documents was to be completed by Nov 25.

The electoral body also announced Nov 29 as the final date for filing of appeals against the acceptance or rejection of nomination papers and Dec 1 as the last date for withdrawal of candidature. The candidates will now file nomination papers on Dec 4 and 5. Each step has been delayed for around two weeks. The polling will be held on Dec 24 instead of Dec 9.

US report validates Pakistan's May victory, says PM

Dawn Report

BAGH: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that a recent report submitted to the United States Congress had validated Pakistan's triumph in the military confrontation with India in May.

"Pakistan's military success over India in its four-day clash showcased Chinese weaponry," said the report submitted by the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission.

After laying the foundation stone for the Daanish School in Azad Jammu and Kashmir's (AJK) Bagh, the PM said in a speech that US President Donald Trump had also acknowledged multiple times that Pakistan downed seven Indian aircraft.

"The exemplary performance of the Pakistan Armed Forces brought the enemy to its knees, by the grace of God," he said, crediting what he termed the leadership of Chief of the Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir.

The premier added that on the economic front as well, the country was moving in the "right direction" and the government was fully focused on achieving sustainable development.

PM Shehbaz expressed hope that one day, India-occupied Kashmir would be freed and Daanish Schools would also be established there.

FCC CJ inspects new Record Room at IHC

CJP Afridi reviews progress on apex court's Reform Action Plan

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) Chief Justice Aminuddin Khan on Thursday visited the designated site for the establishment of a new Record Room within the premises of the Islamabad High Court (IHC).

Accompanied by Justice Ali Baqir Najafi and Justice Arshad Hussain Shah, the FCC CJ reviewed the proposed arrangements and approved the shifting of the relevant judicial files from the Supreme Court to the newly identified Record Room facility at the IHC.

During the visit, Justice Aminuddin stressed the importance of a secure archiving and efficient accessibility of judicial records to support ongoing and future judicial proceedings.

After inspecting the Record Room site, the FCC chief justice also visited the area earmarked for the establishment of a desk for receiving fresh institution cases, petitions for certified copies and information requests.

Following the review, he approved the immediate functioning of the desk, which is strategically located near the IHC reception area for the convenience of litigants, lawyers and general public.

A number of lawyers had complained that they were unsure where the petitions before the FCC should be filed, as no such facility previously existed within the IHC premises where the FCC is housed.

Meanwhile, in a meeting with the FCC chief justice, the office-bearers of the Islamabad High Court Bar Association welcomed these developments as part of the court's commitment to improve administrative efficiency, enhance public facilitation and ensure streamlined judicial processes.

CJP chairs meeting

Separately, in line with his vision for a citizen-centric justice system, Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi presided over the eighth interactive progress review session at the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

The meeting assessed monthly progress under the Reform Action Plan (RAP) and issued directions on pending initiatives and upcoming milestones.

During the briefing, the CJP reviewed the progress made under the reform framework. Of the 86 initiatives identified in the RAP, 36 have been completed, 45 are under implementation, and 13 are scheduled to begin shortly. These indicators reflect the judiciary's continuing effort to modernise processes, enhance institutional efficiency, and strengthen public-facing services.

He examined updates on case disposal, case categorisation, record digitisation, IT integration, financial controls and public facilitation initiatives.

Dar, Nato chief discuss defence cooperation

BRUSSELS: Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar held talks here on Thursday with Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte, during which both sides pledged deeper cooperation on regional security, counterterrorism and shared geopolitical concerns.

According to *Anadolu Agency,* the meeting, held at Nato headquarters, focused on the state of Pakistan-US ties amid rising instability in South Asia. According to Pakistan's foreign ministry post on social media platform X (formerly Twitter), the discussions also covered climate change and other global developments.

Mr Rutte praised Pakistan's "contributions to regional peace and stability" and acknowledged its counterterrorism efforts. Mr Dar reiterated Islamabad's "unwavering commitment" to tackling militancy, warning that the threat Pakistan faces is "primarily supported and perpetrated from beyond its borders".

The foreign minister said Pakistan sought a "peaceful and stable South Asia" and emphasised the need for constructive dialogue. Both sides agreed to expand engagement and continue cooperation on security challenges.

"European and South Asian security are intertwined," Rutte said on X after the meeting, calling close cooperation "essential for promoting stability and prosperity".

The deputy PM's meeting with the Nato chief is part of a three-day visit to Brussels, which began on Wednesday. It marked the first such high-level meeting since then-Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi met with former Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg in 2021.

In a separate engagement, Mr Dar met EU Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen to discuss ways of strengthening Pakistan-EU cooperation ahead of the 7th Pakistan-EU Strategic Dialogue, which the foreign minister will co-chair.

Later, hosting a dinner for members of the European parliament at Pakistan House, the deputy PM urged European businesses to invest in Pakistan, citing opportunities in agriculture, textiles, housing and information technology, APP reported.

With more than 60pc of its population under 30, Pakistan was emerging as a rising economy, he said.

Calling the Pakistan-EU relationship a "pillar for peace, stability and development", Mr Dar said Islamabad aimed to deepen political and economic ties with the bloc, highlighting the role of the GSP+ trade regime in boosting bilateral trade and investment.

The dinner was attended by senior MEPs, including committee chairs and coordinators dealing with South Asia, foreign affairs, trade and security, as well as Pakistan's senior diplomatic representatives. —Monitoring Desk / Agencies